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Remodeling the CIA more cloak, less dagger

From red wigs at the Ellsberg psychiatrist break-in to bumbling armies in Laos, the CIA has been getting a bad press lately. Here a longtime capital newsman and seasoned observer of the intelligence and 'dirty tricks' agency comments on how the spy agency could be overhauled.

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The spies may not all be in from the cold — but the canaries are starting to sing.

The trickle of critical "exposes" about the Central Intelligence Agency by ex-employees or associates is becoming a flood. Each book seems to generate another, as America's spies go public for the good of their souls, their pocketbooks, or both.

In recent years — apart from Wise and Ross's "The Invisible Empire," an excellent journalistic work — there have appeared Patrick MacGarvey's "CIA: The Myth and the Madness," J. Fletcher Prouty's "The Secret Team," and Alfred McCoy's "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia."

Just out is "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence" by Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, the most authoritative to date. Now looming over the horizon is still another expose; this one planned by Philip B. F. Agee, who spent many years under-cover in Latin America until in 1969 he quit the CIA, apparently much disillusioned, to retire to England. His British publishers, Penguin, are said to have been asked to cut several passages by British intelligence — working, presumably, at the behest of their American counterparts.

"This publicity is unprecedented," said an intelligence specialist here. "The CIA seems unable to hold cover on anything these days. It must really be bothering them."

So it appears. Six months ago the new CIA director William F. Colby, a trim ex-Princetonian with a quarter-century experience in clandestine operations, sent up for White House approval draft amendments to the 1947 National Security Act (which created the CIA). If passed by Congress — which now seems increasingly unlikely in today's reaction to Watergate — the legislation would impose 10-year jail terms and \$10,000 fines on anyone violating what the CIA calls "secrecy."

Exposes preferred to denials.

Under Mr. Colby's proposals all book, magazine, newspaper, radio, and television exposure of the CIA or its sister intelligence agencies could be blocked or litigated to death. That is, all but what the CIA wants put out, such as pictures of Director and Mrs. Colby on the recent cover of a nationally syndicated Sunday supplement.

In an article inside, Mr. Colby explained how he was refurbishing the CIA's image, especially by cutting back on "dirty tricks" overseas. Independent and authoritative reports suggest that if dirty tricks abroad are diminishing, the CIA itself is not. At this moment it is expanding its overseas operations, especially in politically wobbly Portugal and Spain, and currently pressing the State Department for more "cover slots" (embassy jobs that provide a legitimate diplomatic cover for CIA agents).

The Agency's bid for censorship power came to light in June, when the agency unsuccessfully sought court orders that would virtually have gutted the Marchetti-Marks book prior to publication. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., threw out all but a handful of CIA-demanded deletions and let the book be published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. But the CIA's struggle to control everything written about it continues.

The struggle points up increasing skepticism in Washington over official declarations of what is legitimate "national security" — as distinct from what is merely convenient secrecy to cover up government blundering or illegality.

In this climate of skepticism, especially among young Americans, the nation seems avid for exposes of the CIA and of other government intelligence agencies: Defense Department intelligence, the code-cracking National Security Agency, the spy satellite National Reconnaissance Office. Wary of what their leaders tell them, many Americans seem to be finding the confessions of the spy masters credible and far more interesting than official denials.

What has gone wrong? Two of the many potential criticisms of the CIA come principally to mind. First, the agency has undoubtedly been damaged